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Labor-Management Relations in North America. Neo-Iiberalism or Democracy?

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Labor-Management Relations in North America. Neo-Liberalism or Democracy

From the end of the 1960s, when the model of development and the economie growth showed some alarming signs of exhaustion, the first reaction of managers was to reduce the costs of production through new forms of flexibility: flexibility of wages to allow immediate adjustments to the economy situation of the firm; flexibility of the work-force by opening new categories of part-time or temporary workers for a tighter allocation of human resources. These initiatives meant that the conventional or contractual rules had to be evaded or dissolved so that rules became the equivalent of rigidity and deregulation the equivalent of flexibility. In the advanced capitalist countries, the political, social and economy debate focused on the alternative between the status quo and neo-liberalism (Boyer, 1986; Lipietz, 1984; Rosanvallon, 1988; Bowles, Cordon, Weisskopf, 1983). In the early 90's, that dichotomy has been superseded by a variety of possibilities, as we will attempt to demonstrate. The object of this paper is first to give a general outline of the old model of firms, then to look at some experiences in the renewal of management styles and labor relations and, lastly, to suggest current different national trends in United States, Canada and Québec.

THE DOMINANT MODEL.

In order to sketch the different models, firms have to be understood according to two dimensions (Laville, 1990), an institutional dimension, which refers to the labor-management

relations and the institutionalized compromise between the parties, and an organizational dimension, that of the division and organization of work within the firms.

The first dimension, institutionalized compromise (or the structural form), defines the rights, obligations and responsibilities of the parties, in other words the rules of the game that determine the respective areas of influence, or the political System of the firm. In the dominant model of the post-war era, the compromise forged by dint of struggle resulted in trade unions recognizing the right of management to control the development and organization of the company, in return for management's recognition of the union as the bargaining agent for wages and collective labor rules. The latter includes the definition and classification of job positions as well as the rules of seniority relating to promotions, transfers and layoffs, and including grievance procedures for failure to respect the collective agreement. Therefore, from the outset, the right of negotiation was limited in its content, by excluding unions from the company's decision-making process, even in the areas of labor organization and technological change. This was, consequently, a form of compromise known as Fordism where, in exchange for management's maintaining its prerogatives, the union negotiates the sharing of capital gain according to the COLA (cost of living adjustment) and AIF (annual improvement factor) formulas (Aglietta, 1976; Kochan, 1986; Boyer, 1986). By putting the emphasis on the labor rules, some authors would define this model as job control unionism (Katz, 1985). Whatever the case, the exclusion of workers from decisions led to diminished quality of products, productivity and so on (Linhart and Linhart, 1985).

In the case of the second dimension which relates to the division and coordination of work (the labor process) the dominant model was Consolidated in keeping with the principles of Taylorism. Taylorism involves the breakdown of tasks into individual operations and mechanization which accelerates the deskilling of workers through the use of machines with technical

know-how, which in turn results in jobs that are reduced to a limited number of simple, closely-defined and repetitive tasks (Piore and Sabel, 1984). Conversely, conception and coordination are the sole prerogative of engineers and technicians who communicate with the workers by means of detailed procedures overseen by a hierarchy of supervisors (Bowles, Cordon, Weisskopf, 1986).

The specified forms of both these dimensions came under attack simultaneously. The Taylorian division of labor was already being contested in the late 60's through a rise in strikes, absenteeism, turnover and low quality. The same happened to the Fordist compromise, with the growing refusal of the deal by which monotony and exclusion were compensated by wages increases. Ail this brought to the fore, without doubt, the social limitations of that model, but it pointed to its technical and economy limitations as well, since the increased costs of mechanization did not general an equal increase in productivity (Coriat, 1979) and thé rigidity of mass production prevented an adjustment to the diversification of markets and products (Piore and Sabel, 1984; Katz and Sabel, 1985).

...AND THE ALTERNATIVES

Faced with this crisis, what are the alternatives or the new trends for the coming years? On the organizational level, taylorism, known as scientific management, has been typified by an extreme division of labor and deskilling combined with control of workers by hierarchy and detailed procedures or directly by machines. Thus there are now two possibilities: either to maintain the deskilling trend via new technologies or to undertake a process of retraining and meet the demands of workers for initiative and creativity as well as consumers' demands for quality. This

upgrading of qualification has to be matched with various forms of reorganization of labor, greater participation, technical, social and cultural training; in that context involvement and trust replace the detailed rules as a coordinating mechanism (Chanlat, 1989; Crozier, 1989). In the management literature which reduces the firm to that single dimension of work organization, this commitment is called the "corporate culture" as opposed to bureaucratie and centralized mode of coordination (Aktouf, 1990).

It would be easy to present more differentiated types of work organization by coloring skilling-deskilling criteria with old or new forms of technologies, but there is no direct link between technology and qualification (Lapointe, 1991), so work organization is best defined by the qualification principle.

As for the institutional System assigning rights and duties to management and labor, Fordism can be maintained with the restriction of collective bargaining to profit-sharing through wage rules and to job classifications, seniority and grievance procedures. But these collective rules considered as a source of rigidity can also be weakened through subcontracting or segmentation, or even be dissolved through individualized contracts. Finally, collective bargaining might contractualize some forms of participation or inclusion in the decision-making process, which means a broadening of the field of negotiation towards what had been management prerogatives like technological changes, training programs or investment policies.

The combination of these organizational and institutional dimensions produces the different configurations (Table 1) of firms and, if one becomes generally accepted in a society, of national trends.

Taking both the compromises (labor contract) and the organization of labor into account, the approach we propose holds several advantages. It enables us to

see clearly for example in what context the process of retraining occurs, that is with or withoutcollective rules. And also we extricate the debate from the dilemma of two and just two labor relations Systems, one, a conflicting or antagonistic model **(adversary bargaining)** and, the other, a cooperative or collaborative model (Katz, 1985). Indeed, the distinctions proposed enable us to see clearly how the participation of workers does not necessarily lead to "collaboration" or the relinquishment of their specified interests since according to the form of labor contract participation can take many forms, that of integrative participation (Californian model according to Messine, 1987) or that of adversary cooperation as in the case of conflict over the democratization of the firm. In doing so, a shift away from Fordism does not necessarily lead to concessions by the workers (Swartz, 1981); first, involvement and initiative become more and more important in the claims of workers, and second, because management requires that commitment, it can be "exchanged" for economy advantages or job security or some new rights and influence in the firm.

A brief comment on each configuration might help to introduce the national trends. The fordist and taylorist ones are now well known: they combine a sharp division of labor with militant unions able to bargain wages increases, good work conditions and seniority rules to cope with layoffs. The renewed fordism adds job tenure to the compromise on wages and work rules so that reskilling and

Table 1 Models of Firms according to organizational and institutional dimensions

Labor contract Labor process	Collective rules and exclusion	Dissolution or weakening of collective rules	Collective rules with inclusion-participation
Deskilling	(1) Fordism and Taylorism	(2> Neo-Fordism (Segmentation Polarization)	(3) Social démocratie Taylorism
Reskilling Organizational and technological changes	(4) Renewed Fordism (Job security and flexibility)	(5) Califomian (Individualization Wage and Job flexibility)	(6) Plant democracy

involvement in quality and productivity may be effective without fear of job losses. The partial or total dissolution of collective rules may be used with the two different forms of work organization. The neo-fordist model deepens the deskilling trend either through new technologies and corresponding new classifications of technical operators, or via the deprivation of *a* part of the workers from the protection of the general rules. Examples include subcontracting, part-time work or two-tiers wages and work conditions. The californian model refers to an individualization of contractual relations and a reorganization of work along the lines of commitment, flexibility and teamwork;

the pay-for-knowledge wage scheme may be used to induce retraining. The neo-fordist and californian configurations represent the neo-liberal trend as far as deregulation is concerned. Finally, the inclusion of workers in decision-making process associated with deskilling was labelled social-democracy taylorism by Boyer (1989), whereas the association of participation with flexibility and commitment would put the democratization of the firm on the agenda.

NATIONAL TRENDS

This typology might help to identify some national trends but it is not an easy task for two main reasons. First, the different models just presented are quite academy; they can be used as references but the monographs show that a single firm is more complex and above ail that the implementation of changes is not a transcript of a model but the result of trials and errors; it is often a mix of two configurations. Second, with the breakdown of the dominant model and the search for new management practices and labor relations, it may well appear that firms in one country and even plants of the same corporation follow different paths (Messine, 1987; Lapointe, 1991). Nevertheless, the observations available allow us to suggest some broad hypotheses about the main trends developing out of Fordism. For Canada and the United States, we rely on published material and for Québec, mainly on our own research.

However, the main problem is elsewhere and can be put this way: is it possible to identify various national strategies within North America? are not the major manufacturing corporations and large unions in the three countries international, that is to say American? Are the governmental economy policies so different as to induce contrasting labor-management relations? Indeed, most American (Kochan, 1986) and European (Boyer, 1990) authors, while

noting some particularities, look at the institutional forms of the firms in North America as one pattern to be compared! to others like Germany or Japan. Our contention here is that the differences are significant enough to pinpoint specified national trends. We will come back to this point later, but the recent history of the UAW (United Auto Workers) will provide a good illustration of our argument.

The bargaining regime in North America is apparently largely decentralized considering the bargaining right is recognized at plant level. Nevertheless a dominant pattern of collective agreement was generalized soon after the Second World War through a two-way process. First, in each large economy sector, the international (American) union selected a target-enterprise to bargain wages and general work conditions; the agreement was extended to ail plants of the sector (pattern or connective bargaining) with minor adjustments at the plant level (Aglietta, 1976; Kochan, Katz, McKersie, 1986). Secondly, the best agreement gained in one sector, and in this regard the UAW was a leader, spread to the others (Benedict, 1985; Campbell et Pépin, 1988) so that a dominant pattern of labor-management relations was gradually laid down.

In the seventies, more and more implicit then explicit local agreements paved the way to the fragmentation of the bargaining regime. In the car industry, the international pattern holds up to 1979, but when the UAW made a series of concessions to Chrysler, the Canadian locals undertook a strong anti-concessions drive and made clear their own objectives, which resulted in the transformation in 1984 of the Canadian branch into an independent national union, the Canadian Auto Workers. That event points out the impossibility from now on of uniformly regulating labor-management relations in ail of North America and thus the emergence of different strategies. Looking at Canada and Québec, one observes here too the differentiation of regulatory mechanisms. Right after the Canadian union signed a national

agreement in 1984, the Québec local entered into a long negotiation with GM-Boisbriand and the local agreement arrived at in 1986 is at variance with the national one on many important issues, as we will show in the comparison below. However the Québec local is still affiliated to the national union.

THE UNITED STATES

A general survey of work organization and labor-management relations in U.S. firms would probably conclude that a large majority of them, at least in the unionized sectors, still stick to the classical fordist-taylorist model. But if we look at new experiments in these areas, it appears that with the exception of some cases of renewed fordism the main trends can be identified as neo-fordist and californian types.

Renewed fordism as a main exception will be considered first because it is closely related to the tensions within the dominant model. Immediately after the "blue collar blues" and the strike at Lordstown (Rotschild, 1973), along with the debates about motivation at work and job enrichment (SHEW, 1973), some large firms including GM and Ford implemented new programs of Quality of Working Life (Chaskiel, 1990; Katz, 1985) like improvement of environment and job enlargement. But the unions were strongly opposed to any changes in the collective contract. The first compromise on these matters in the car industry appeared in the GM-UAW agreements of 1982 and 1984 when a job security program including retraining was concluded, as well as provisions for most flexible work rules. With this program no one could be laid off due to contracting out, technological change or increased productivity, or if so, they would be trained for new jobs. This agreement meant that job security was offered to reduce résistance among the workers to the technological modernization plans

(Coriat, 1985; Katz, 1985b), but, most importantly, it aimed also at reducing the collective résistance to commitment to productivity increases and participation in organizational innovations (Campbell et Pépin, 1988). Some flexibility in work rules weakened opposition to initiatives like semi-autonomous teamwork or quality circles. In that way, it is a reversal of the deskilling process but within the limits of a fordist collective contract. There is no redefinition of the union's role and the innovations concern only the work organization; it is a renewed or rejuvenated (Boyer, 1990) fordism.

This model did not spread in the American firms mainly because of the opposition of both unions and management. For the unions, the reorganization of the work process was not seen as an initiative to establish a new compromise but only as a series of concessions (Parker and Slaughter, 1989) that are ultimately threatening to unions: interior competition between plants, subcontracting, and displacement towards non-unionized areas. Also the diversity of local arrangements was considered as a threat to then unity of national unions (Katz and Sabel, 1985) and to the traditional role of the delegates in the plants.

The management was losing some prerogatives like the restrictions on employment flexibility or layoffs. Above ail, management never fully accepted the presence of unions and always tried to limit their rights; they were considered as having been imposed by the New Deal administration (Noël, 1990). With the steady decline of union membership from 31% in 1970 to 15% in 1989 (Coates, 1989), labor-management relations became less and less innovative, more and more adversorial, and the opposition to unions was intensified (Kochan, Katz, McKersie, 1986). Thus management had two alternatives: the californian and neo-fordist strategies.

The californian strategy is quite adequate to the management ideology and practice favouring the free market to make the necessary adjustments. Its objective was to introduce the non-unionized model based on the reorganization of labor and **human resource management (Katz, 1985; Heckscher, 1988). This** model had always been présent in thé United States in major corporations

such as IBM; it was considered as a way to avoid unionization by granting wages and employee benefits comparable to those negotiated in the large unionized companies, while skirting the "rigid" labor rules and the "cumbersome" grievance procedures. The success of companies having adopted the non-unionized model combined with union opposition to any major amendment to the collective agreement prompted the automobile industry and others to locate their new plants in the Southern areas where state laws are unfavourable to unions. This southern strategy has two advantages: with the declining influence of the unionized sector on the non-unionized one, the pressure on high wages is now weakened; and without collective rules of the fordist type, management can introduce new forms of work organization. For example, GM relied at least partly on this strategy at the beginning of the 80s. The teamwork organization was at first implemented in ten non-unionized plants located in southern areas (Katz, 1985).

The work teams required that labor rules be radically changed, or absent ail together, since the roughly 50 or 60 conventional jobs classifications were reduced to only one. Jobs were redefined to allow a team of 8 to 10 workers to carry out the production tasks as well as those of inspection, handling and maintenance. The work teams were responsible for the distribution of tasks as well as problem-solving; a policy of wages according to skills (pay for knowledge) was introduced to facilitate flexibility and acquisition of skills. Since the collective agreement was modelled on taylorism (Piore, 1982), the southern strategy sought to solve both "problems" at the same time which resulted in a californian model of plants. Later the team System was "exported" to unionized areas and in some cases the local unions accepted to revise the collective agreement to support work team initiatives, but this situation is indicative of either renewed fordism or plant democracy and no longer of the californian model.

The **neo-Fordism** seems to have been, with the californian one, the other most widespread model in United States. The neo-fordism deepens fordism in two ways: the process of deskilling and replacement of workers is accelerated through new technologies when the policy of cost reduction is also carried on by trying to evade the collective agreements.

A large part of management believed that the non-homogeneity of American workers would rule out the forming of semi-autonomous teams (Parker and Slaughter, 1989) and that Japan's success could be ascribed to its investment in technology (Nora, 1988), for example, between 1981 and 1988, GM invested over $5 billion in new technologies (Huard, 1990). The automation has been tacked on to old production diagrams (Nora, 1988) so the result was a case of hybridation of assembly-line with computer control (Boyer, 1989). Furthermore, there was no up-grading of skills, competences or commitments of the workers. On the contrary, new technicians were called upon to operate computers, so the traditional workers' know-how was still more undervalued. This is what happened in the American aluminium industry where workers had no access to the new computers controlling the production process (Lapointe, 1991).

At the same time, many forms of avoiding the collective rules were worked out. The "concessions bargaining" is well known: the COLA and AIF as wage rules were dropped; wage increases had the form of flat sums not integrated into the salary scale; share ownership programs were introduced (Katz and Meltz, 1988). These concessions, which had originated in the automobile industry in 1979, spread to a number of other industries, including steel, meat packing and some airlines (Katz, 1985). Wage concessions also took on the form of a polarization of the labor collective through the introduction of two-tiered agreements whereby new employees received a lower salary — between 15% and sometimes as much as 62% less — as in the airline industry in 1985, and for the same job (Campbell and Pépin, 1988). At Ford and GM, in 1982, newly-hired

employees received 85% of the regular salary and the waiting period to reach parity, which was 40 days, was prolonged to 545 days (Huard, 1990). Contracting out and relocation of plants in developing countries, including Mexico were also parts of that neo-fordist strategy (Piore and Sabel, 1984).

In the case of the United States we can draw several conclusions. Indeed, it would seem that the main trend is towards dissolving or weakening collective rules, hence towards deregulating labor relations. This would indicate a form of **neo-liberalism** in which two models would co-exist (see Table 2): a.) **neo-Fordism** based on both deskilling by means of new technologies, and polarization of the collective, which further calls for contracting out, and b.) an individualized **Californian model,** symbolized by the southern strategy. This second model is evidently the most significant not only in the small and medium-sized businesses which as a rule are non unionized (Messine, 1987), but also in larger companies where it reinforces the already widespread non-unionized model, putting the emphasis on labor reorganization through requalification and participation.

CANADA

In the case of Canada, except for Québec which we will examine in the following section, it would appear that modifications to Fordism are more difficult to bring about and that when they are occurring, they illustrate a trend towards neo-fordism. Here also the car industry is a good example of the main orientation of labor-management relations and work organization.

In the car industry, there have been neither huge concessions nor successful de-unionization strategies nor major reforms of the organization of labor. Through a strike at Chrysler in 1982 and another in 1984 against GM, the Canadian Auto Workers

(CAW) rejected ail the demands for concessions that their American counterparts had accepted. Wages continued to go up according to the classic COLA and AIF formulas, therefore surpassing those of the American workers (Campbell and Pépin, 1988; Huard, 1990). This divergence in bargaining strategies entailed, as we have already mentioned, a split between the international union and the creation of the CAW in 1984. There were, of course, wage concessions in some sectors. Also, a southern-style strategy is harder to apply in Canada since no province has adopted legislation in favour of the right to work and, in consequence, non-unionization. Moreover, the rate of unionization is much higher than in the United States: 36.2% as opposed to about 15% in 1989. It should also be noted that the rate of unionization is steadily increasing in Canada (it was only 28.4% in 1951), whereas in the United States, it has been steadily declining from its highest level of 31.7%, reached in 1955 (Coates et al., 1989). In any case, although present, the non-unionized model is less generalized in Canada than in the United States.

In the automotive industry, some attempts have been made to introduce QLW or quality circle programs. Strong worker opposition caused one such attempt to fail (Parker, 1986). In another case, participation groups were set up with the union's consent, but after two years, the plant committee curtailed its collaboration by withdrawing its representatives from the planning committee (Rinehart, 1984). Only one appears to have taken hold, GM-Suzuki, where the "Japanese model" had been negotiated with the union in 1985 (Campbell and Pépin, 1988) but this is an isolated case. In ail economy sectors, there have been much fewer initiatives of work reorganization in Canada than in the United States. According to a recent survey, there were proportionally half as many initiatives undertaken in Canada than in U.S. (Long,1991).

Union opposition therefore blocks the way to the Californian as well to the renewed Fordist models. For employers, the only way out of Fordism would be to resort to contracting out and part-time

work which would result in diluted collective standards; in a recent poll, these were the main objectives put forward by Canadian management for the next bargaining round (Kumar and Coates, 1989). There were indeed wages concessions in some sectors as well as two-tiered clauses, but they occurred with some delay (Wood, no date), which demonstrated stronger résistance on the part of the unions, and some new cases of subcontracting in order to reduce costs were noted (Drache et Glasbeek, 1990).

If we venture to generalize these observations, the conclusion would be that then **Fordist model** appears to hold sway in Canada while the alternatives lean towards **neo-Fordism.** The difference from the U.S. can be explained by differences of the social forces. In Canada the rate of unionization is high and unions are powerful, well-organized and, especially, defensive; they consider every move from Fordism, even those regarding new forms of work organization as a threat to the future of unions (Drache and Glasbeek, 1990; Rinehart, 1986). On the other side, the uncertainty and splits among Canadian employers regarding human resource management strategies (Smith, 1990) hinder the implementation of new labor-management relations.

QUÉBEC

Does Québec form a distinct society in the area of labor relations? Labor-management relations here are as diverse as anywhere else. There are companies to fit every model of Table 1. The public sector and corporations such as Hydro-Québec, for example, lean towards neo-Fordism (contracting out, part-time, polarization, etc.) and therefore towards a lessening of collective rules (Chanlat, 1984; Hafsi and Demers, 1989; Bélanger and Lévesque, 1987 and 1990). And many cases of renewed fordism could cited (Lapointe, 1991; Doré and Ferland, 1991). But relying on

monographs available, our contention is that there is an emerging Québec style characterized by the co-existence of the Californian and plant democracy models.

The GM plant in Boisbriand probably represents a model unprecedented in the North American auto industry and shares some of the elements of plant democracy. At the beginning of the 1980s, the plant was threatened with closure: on the productivity and quality scales of ail the GM plants in North America, Boisbriand was listed the last one; around 6000 to 7000 grievances were unsettled in 1984; the local agreement was the last one to be signed in 1984, so delaying the national (Canadian) negotiation; the plant lost the contract to assemble a new car, the GM-10. These are some indications of the adversarial fordist relations prevailing in that plant. A new manager was mandated from Détroit to try to redress the plant's problems and, if not successful, to close it. At the same time, new local union leaders had been elected to cope with the workers' exasperation giving rise to grievances. Both parties engaged in an in-depth process of reflection on labor-management relations and labor organization. During the process of negotiation, old grievances were settled and new ones went down to nearly zero; roughly 35% of management positions were abolished and the plant, with fairly obsolete technology, soared to first place in terms of performance (productivity and quality). And it recently succeeded in obtaining a ten-year contract highly coveted by a number of other plants, most of them in the United States. The agreement was concluded after two years of negotiations. Three innovations warrant special mention: the declaration of principles, the work teams and the joint committees (Huard, 1990).

Both parties adopted a declaration of principles which is far from the traditional recognition of management rights. It states that the union's role is to improve the quality of working life, the job security and the environment where members are treated with dignity and respect; that the company's objectives are to secure its

growth and build the best quality product; and that both parties have agreed on means to achieve their objectives. This declaration realizes the move from a defensive unionism of opposition to an offensive unionism of proposal.

As for the organization of teamwork, this also differs from the one implemented in non-unionized firms or where the local union is in a weak position like at NUMMI. There cooperation is urged by management and encouraged via individual incentives (Kochan, Katz and McKersie, 1986; see also Parker and Slaughter, 1988, and their description of work teams at NUMMI). At Boisbriand, it was an issue in a negotiation process and collective rules haven been established. For example, team leaders who relieve the foremen are members of the union and appointed by seniority; the pay for knowledge was turned down and wage increases are also subject to promotion rules according to seniority; absenteeism remains the responsibility of management and not of the work teams. Thus, while accepting the basic principles of working in teams (accountability, involvement in quality, improvement of production procedures, flexibility in the assignment of tasks through simplified classifications), the union refused to individualize wages and relations with management. It insisted on collective standards promoting the solidarity and unity of workers.

This modus operandi of the teams is seconded by joint committees which, on the one hand, monitor the setting-up and operations of the teams, and on the other, ensure the teams have a say in activities and decisions which until then had been considered as prerogatives of the management, such as personnel transfers, new technologies, training programs, company performance, etc. As compared to Fordism, these joint committees represent an enlargement of the rights of the union and an inclusion in the policy-making mechanisms of the plant. Along with the declaration of principles and the reskilling of workers through teamwork organization, this increased participation can be considered as a trend towards plant democracy.

Quite similar cases could be described. A well documented analysis of the aluminums industry in Québec shows that some of the seven plants are heading for that model (Lapointe, 1991). Already the work organization has been changed: tasks are broadened to allow for versatility and rotation; operators have been trained to use the computers without technical management personnel, involvement in productivity and quality is recognized and in one plant promoted by job security. The mechanisms of participation are less explicitly developed but the local union is associated with many informal joint committees.

The Californian model is also wide spread in Québec. The most representative firms of that trend are located outside large cities, controlled by new Québec francophone managers, some of these firms being considered as symbols of performance and success. The main features of these firms are a low degree of institutionalization of the relations between management and the workforce combined with a high degree of workers' involvement in the firm and trust in the management.

The low institutionalization is obvious in one of these firms, Cascades Inc. In most of the about thirty plants, there is no union; yet there are yearly negotiations, but the meetings are quite informal and are concluded by the managers' decisions on what demands can be satisfied. Furthermore, some decisions remain implicit and rest upon custom or mutual confidence. There is no codification of the profit-sharing program nor a formal provision about job security, but every worker is feels secure that there will be no layoffs and that a fair bonus will be distributed (Cuggia, 1989; Aktouf, 1990).

In these firms, the work organization is less than rigid. There are no detailed job definitions, the workteams are the central pieces of the labor process and their responsability and autonomy is acknowledged by thé absence of foremen. The coordination does not follow a strict hierarchical line: there are few levels of authority, more mutual understandings than orders;

communications are addressed at the level or the service concerned; formal rules are minimal. The main mechanism of coordination is "cultural": confidence, mutual respect, trust, sense of belonging, responsability, participation, commitment are the key symbols of that form of organization and are always reinforced by charismatic leaders.

The trend in Québec leads to the cooperative models, either management-leaded (californian) or negotiated (plant democracy). The first one, as far as it is located in small communities or regional areas, can be understood as a feature of regional identity where relations are both cooperative and competitive. Mutual help binds people together on the same issues, and worker-management relations are less adversorial because of mobility, kinship and closeness (Billette and Carrier, 1991). These features give rise to local institutions as regulatory mechanisms and to less institutionalized more paternalistic and charismatic relations in the workplace. The second one has to be referred at least partly to specified labor-management relations. The union density is high at 40 percent (Grant and Lebeau, 1991); the unionism is less "international" (American) and more Québec grounded; above ail, it is less defensive and more open to work reorganization (Doré and Ferland, 1991) and concerted policy with management (Fournier, 1991).

CONCLUSION

One of the conclusions that can be drawn from our first investigation is the diversity of national trends in North America. These remain to be clearly defined; in every country, we may find firms that fall under one or the other of the models identified. However, in every country, we noted trends forming around not one model but at least two (see Table 2).

In the U.S., as we have noted, the union density is relatively low (15 percent) and, moreover, it has been decreasing since the 1950s as if the earlier movement was being systematically attacked by employers. It is well documented that American employers are fiercely attached to their prerogatives and management's rights (Perline and Poynter, 1991), even more than Canadian employers (Kochan, 1986). The political coalition favourable to trade unions lost more and more ground (Heckscher, 1988) and right-to-work legislation in some southern states

Table 2 Hodels of Firms: Canada, Québec, U.S.A..

Labor contract / Labor process	Collective rules and exclusion	Dissolution or veakening of collective rules	Collective rules with inclusion-participation
Deskilling	**(1) Fordism**	**(2) Neo-Fordism**	**(3) Social democratie Taylorism**
	C-A-N-A-D-A		
	(4) Reneved Fordism	**(5) CiJifo**	**U. S. A.**
Reskilling			**(6) Plant**
Organizational and technological changes			**Q-U-E-B-E-C**

—— fluctuation of national models

encouraged de-unionization. Whereas in the 1960s, unions had been able to impose and generalize the advantages they negotiated, today, the non-unionized model **(southern strategy)** serves as an example to firms as a whole. Perhaps we can conclude that centralized unions accustomed to settling ail manner of demands on a monetary level reacted belatedly to the labor crisis and to the new, more qualitative demands of the workers. During the wave of concessions, unions as powerful as the UAW were unable to come up with compensations or new issues with then result that, in many cases, **neo-Fordism** took root. Besides the labor-management relations, some other institutional factors have prevented the renewal of work organization and of the very strategies of unions and management. For examples, as Boyer noted, "the strength of financial short run objectives hinders the boldness of strategies choice of industrial renaissance and implementation of a new capital labor relation. (And) the poor performance of the education System does not help in engineering an upgrading of skills, competences and commitments" (Boyer, 1989).

In Canada, the high level of union density (36%), a less bureaucratic activism, a defensive orientation and the endorsement of a social democratic political party (NDP) placed the unions in a better position than the American ones to uphold acquired gains and resist the anti-union movement. On the other hand, the national Canadian bourgeoisie is quite divided by the presence of powerful foreign industrial capital beside weak indigenous industrialists and strong indigenous financiers (Panitch, 1985). This division prevents the development of a national strategy of industrialization and helps to explain the weight of regional interests in the policy-making process (Jenson, 1990). A strong and defensive unionism tried to block the exits from **Fordism** while the splits in management resulted in hesitant and few initiatives regarding new models of firms (Long, 1991; Smith, 1990). For the uncompetitive firms, the only available strategy was to reduce

costs by segmentation or new technologies, that is via **neo-fordism.**

The Québec pattern seems to be different from both U.S. and Canada. The presence of a **Californian model,** as elsewhere, is not a new phenomenon. But it has received these last years a new impulse from dynamic francophone management who rely on communion and informal relations to face the challenge of the international environment. Some of these leaders use in their own interest, that is preventing unionization, some of the principles of the new emerging compromise between unions and management which resulted in the **plant democracy** model. This conflicting cooperation model singles out Québec from both the U.S. and the rest of Canada and can be accounted for by the institutional setting. First the large collective effort of modernization since the 1960s has resulted in a network of state, cooperative and private corporations-Québec **Inc.-** which is unique in North America (Fraser, 1987) and induces to societal responsibility. Second, many union-management-state joint boards (like health and safety at work) and consultative forums (like "Sommets économiques" and "Forum sur l'emploi") have paved the way for alliances in formulating major national strategies either in economy development projects or in vocational training, for example. Third, unions have made pledges to the renewal of labor-management relations and the management of firms for a more democratic participation; the CNTU (Confédération of National Trade Unions) emphazises work reorganization while the QFL (Québec Fédération of Labor) stresses full employment and has set up a Workers' Solidarity Fund devoted to investing risk capital to save jobs and to support workers' commitment in these firms.

These different trends in North America deserve greater study indeed. Most of the time, explanations regarding both the differences between Canada and U.S. (Lipset, 1986) and between Canada and Québec (Aktouf,1990; Chanlat, 1990) refer to cultural, even religious, dimensions. Our objective here is just to suggest

some clues that focus on the institutional (Aglietta, 1976) or societal (Maurice, 1989) setting. But given that the institutions are rooted in social classes and social movements (Lipietz, 1989; Touraine, 1978), we have to admit that research remains to be done since the land is unexplored.

Lastly, from a North American standpoint, it must be acknowledged that, even more than elsewhere, the problem of reskilling and work reorganization is of the highest importance. Most of the comparative studies conclude that, at least partly, the relative success of Germany and Japan, for example, relies on flexible organization and vocational training (Coriat, 1990; Streeck, 1989). Indeed diversity and quality of products cannot be dealt with by purely taylorist methods of production. They require enlarged competences, commitment and responsibility. Furthermore, these requirements match pressing workers' demands for initiative and autonomy. These new features lead to decentralization, teamwork and increased communications among workers and with other levels and sectors in the firm. In order to cope with fast changes and larger integration between manual and intellectual components of any work, not only can workers[1] know-how not be denied any longer, but they will also need more training and educational background.

This new situation raises the problem of integration or coordination within the firm. If the firm, to meet today's challenges, has to support workers' autonomy and grant thé means to encourage it, how are authority and power to be maintained? Cannot this autonomy become the source of more disputes and conflict? This autonomy can be turned to a strong identification to the firm's objectives through personal leadership and "corporate culture" (Messine, 1987). This can lead to new forms of domination through symbolic manipulation of motives and interests. Workers' conditions then lie with management's goodwill: they will deteriorate if short-term objectives prevail and managers relie on

money exchange rates, interest rates or wage decreases to face the competitive environment.

But since autonomy and commitment are required by modem management, they can be "offered" by unions in exchange of good wages and improved working conditions as well as some inclusion in the policy-making process. This institutional arrangement presents two main advantages. First, the managers are forced to innovate and launch new and high value-added products in order to survive (Boyer, 1989). And second, participation via democratic mechanisms strengthens workers' involvement and enlarges their knowledge of the firm's management and needs, though it requires common objectives and less symbolic manipulation.

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